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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

I.

COFFEE-DRINKING IN EASTERN EUROPE.

THE opinions recently expressed in a short but interesting article on "Coffee-Drinking and Blindness," being based upon the writer's personal experience and observation, ought to have considerable weight, and should serve as a timely warning to those who indulge in this refreshing beverage to excess, or, indeed, indulge in it at all, if they have found its effects in any way injurious to their general health or to any particular organ. We perfectly agree with that writer in his remarks upon the seductive influences of habit in these things, and the extreme difficulty of shaking it off, as in opium- or tobacco-smoking, when years have fastened the practice upon the victim. What we would venture to criticize is the error of generalizing what is, no doubt, applicable only to special cases, as is too often apt to be the habit with reformers, whether the hobby they ride be temperance, anti-smoking, or anti-any other recognized evil. Probably the greatest moral curse of the nations to-day is intemperance, and he or she who enters the field to put down, with the force of argument or appeal, this crying evil,—whose devastating effects are corrupting the souls and bodies of millions of our fellow-beings, increasing the poverty of the working classes, and turning homes of happiness into hells of vice and horror,—ought to receive our earnest support and be ranked among the saviors of society.

But even in liquor-drinking there is a line to be drawn, and while many acknowledge this to be true, they fear to draw the line, lest advantage should be taken of it to defend the *excess*, which, after all, is the great evil to be attacked and destroyed. Nobody can deny with any show of justice that with many men—not all men—a moderate use, with one's meals, of *pure and unadulterated* fermented juice of the grape, called wine, is, if not absolutely necessary, wholesome and beneficial to the system. We do not refer to the class called invalids, who act under the physician's orders, but to men who enjoy an average condition of good health, and to whom animal and other nutritious food is inadequate by itself to support the system in its normal condition. Take as an example one whose daily occupation involves a good deal of mental strain, and to whom the quickening and permanent influences of a glass or two of sound sherry, madeira, or bordeaux are an unquestioned benefit. It must be admitted by the unprejudiced mind that it is the quality more than the quantity of the stuff which the poor man pours down his throat in daily, and often hourly, libations which burns, poisons, and finally destroys his system. In most countries it will be found that the hard-working man, temperate in all things, who takes a glass or two of *good* beer after his work, or while at work, is not injured but nourished thereby.

We apply this experience to coffee-drinking, and are persuaded, from our observation of many years in Greece and Turkey, that the moderate use of pure coffee is—one might almost say—a blessing to rich and to poor. Excess in its use, or the use of it at all, except when the decoction is made from the genuine coffee-berry, and properly made, is, beyond any question, an evil. One must live in the East for awhile—or, if not there, confine himself to partaking of the beverage in other countries, where the character of the café, or the house where it is served, is a guarantee of its purity—to appreciate what "a cup of coffee" really means. It is a recognized

fact that the mixture drunk by the majority of people in Europe and our own country, under the name of coffee, is a vile, or, at the best, an adulterated compound of inferior berries, beans, or other substitutes, and that when occasionally the genuine coffee-berry is the basis of the hot fluid served at the hotels, railroad stations, restaurants, and even in private houses, it is not prepared properly, and more frequently than otherwise injures the digestion and, consequently, the health of the constant drinker.

In Athens, broadly speaking, every third man indulges in cigarette-smoking and coffee-drinking, and this to an extent that astonishes the stranger. It is an everyday sight, when entering an office or private sitting-room, and not infrequently the family room, to see the tobacco-box, cigarette-paper, and ash-box lying on the table, and the visitor is expected, without invitation, to help himself and light his cigarette, as a preparation for and companion to conversation. Little cups of black coffee follow as a matter of course, however early or late the hour may be. But the Greek does not confine his attentions to the coffee-cup to these occasions. He often takes his first cigarette and his first cup in bed, before rising, and continues the practice at intervals through the entire day. It is something akin to the habit of ice-water drinking in the United States, but without the subtle, injurious results that follow an habitual use of cold liquids, which chill the stomach, impair the general health, and produce decayed teeth. So far as our personal observation goes, strengthened by medical testimony, the Greeks in the condition of their general health do not support the theory that the habitual use of coffee injures the system or affects the eye-sight. The use of spectacles in Athens, distinctly a population of scholars, writers, and readers, is as rare as it is prevalent in Germany, where beer-drinking and smoking are more prevalent than coffee-drinking.

The same is the case in Turkey. There coffee-drinking is universal and continuous. The writer passed the greater part of four years at Constantinople, where he had occasion to call upon the officials of the Sublime Porte so frequently that it would be difficult to enumerate these official visits; and with few exceptions, when the visit was protracted to any length, black coffee, pure in quality and prepared with the grounds, was regularly served in small delicate cups. All Turks, from the highest to the lowest, indulge in the beverage, a few swallows at a time, throughout the day, and without any evil effects. What makes the fact the more remarkable is that neither the sedentary habits of the Turk nor the quick, energetic temperament of the Greek seems to be affected by the perpetual imbibing of this beverage. Spectacles, it may be remarked, are as little used in Turkey as in Greece; nor are complaints of the eyes more prevalent, if we except ophthalmia, which is brought from Egypt and exists chiefly among the unclean and dissolute lower orders. An old Pacha once told us that he considered coffee to be one of the greatest blessings vouchsafed by Allah to the faithful, not only for its grateful aroma, but from its health-preserving qualities. He referred, of course, to the "divine berry" of Mocha, and not to the questionable compound served up in the "infidel" countries of the West.

That coffee has certain medicinal effects, under certain circumstances, must be admitted. One remarkable example of this occurred in the present writer's experience. A relative of ours, a lady, after a long illness, was finally "given up" by the physicians in attendance, owing to the inability of the patient to retain any food, liquid or solid. Days had passed in this hopeless condition and the patient was rapidly sinking from utter exhaustion. Everything she attempted to swallow was rejected, until an old black servant, long in the family, asked permission to try an experiment in which she had great faith. "Anything, anything you please," said the doctors; "nothing can save her now." The old woman rushed to the kitchen and soon reappeared with a cup of hot black coffee, into which she had broken the yolk of a raw egg. This the patient swallowed and retained, and from that moment rallied and lived for, if we remember rightly, several months after, succumbing at last to her malady, which was consumption.

Speaking of doctors recalls to mind an incident in connection with the coffee question. Many years ago, in Boston, a discussion arose which gave rise to numer-

ous letters in the newspapers, pro and con., as to the effects of tea and coffee. The advocates of each beverage pronounced his own favorite drink to be wholesome, and denounced the other as poisonous. The question was finally referred to one of the oldest physicians—Dr. Jacob Bigelow, we believe—for a solution, by which each of the contending parties agreed to abide. The doctor took his time about it, and an elaborate treatise was expected in reply. At last it came. If it was not satisfactory, it was at least definite—so far as it went. The learned referee stated that, after a full and careful examination of the question, he had no hesitation in declaring that “one of the two articles mentioned, tea and coffee, *was* a poison.” Which one he did not specify; thus, diplomatically, offending the prejudices of neither party, and probably confirming each in its own opinion. Hence the great tea and coffee question remains open for discussion, and the only decision that appears to us to be of any value is that which each consumer of these beverages draws from his own experience.

CHARLES K. TUCKERMAN.

II.

CHRISTIANITY BECOMING MATERIALIZED.

THE following incident happened not long ago in one of the largest cities in this country :

An important church in the city owed a large sum of money to a very wealthy man, one of its leading members. But though the money was overdue, the church officers felt no anxiety, as their creditor not only appeared to have the interests of the church at heart, but was abundantly able to wait until it should be able to pay him, and, indeed, frequently expressed himself to that effect. At this point he was proved to be guilty of having broken one of the ten commandments,—which one it is immaterial to say here,—and as the transgression was a matter of common fame, the officers of the church were compelled to take cognizance of it. They did so, and, finding him guilty, declared him suspended from membership until he should give some proof of having repented. The offender, though acknowledging the charge against him, was furious at the audacity of the church in presuming to discipline him, and sent word to the officers that if he was not reinstated within a week, he should at once proceed to collect the money which the church owed him. He was reinstated in three days, or as soon as the meeting of the officers could be convened, and is to-day a member in good standing of that church.

Some few years ago, in a small town in the central part of this State, there was a church which had recently called to the pastorate a young man of strong religious convictions and fervid piety. He had not been pastor long before he learned that the leading member of his church, and the wealthiest and most influential man in the town, was living in open sin. It had been a matter of common notoriety for years, but the former pastor, a weak, good-natured man, having an eye to the rich man's very liberal contributions, discreetly ignored the matter. The new pastor, however, was a man of very different character, and, after privately admonishing the culprit to no effect, publicly cut him off from membership in the church. What was the result ? The sinner, of course, withdrew his contributions, and so great was his influence in the town that the church members generally condemned the clergyman for so offending him. Some actually upbraided him for driving a good-paying member away by needlessly raking up a little private matter that was nobody's business. The poor man's salary was so reduced that he was finally compelled to resign. This, of course, was a triumph for the rich magnate. A man was called as pastor who had no desire to stir up unpleasant matters, and who was only too willing to conciliate a man of wealth and position. The rich man, still living in open sin, is an honored member of the church, while the clergyman, who tried to end the scandal of his membership, is looked upon as a sort of Quixotic crank, and with this reputation, earned by his uncompromising devotion to principle, he finds it impossible to obtain any permanent or desirable charge.

Multitudes of other instances, differing in many details, but all showing the subservieney of American Christianity to the money power, might be adduced. The